SOME PACIFIC NORTHWEST NATIVE LANGUAGE NAMES FOR THE SASQUATCH PHENOMENON

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Abstract

This paper provides two instances of cross-genetic lexical borrowing[1] of the name for the Sasquatch phenomenon among Pacific Northwest native languages.

This short piece has been written in response to Roderick Sprague's recent *NARN* editorial (1970:128) which called for "reasonably scientific paper[s] dealing with the Sasquatch phenomenon." For some years now, in line with an interest in the Pacific Northwest as a linguistic area or *Sprachbund*, I have been assembling materials which evidence lexical borrowing across genetic boundaries among the native languages of the area. Some examples include the names for the bluejay, bobcat (or wildcat), buzzard (or vulture), coyote, crane, crab (or crawfish), cricket, jackrabbit, lynx, mountain lion, raccoon, robin, seal, and turtle which variously are found in similar or identical phonetic shapes among the languages of the Southern Plateau and those of the nearby Chinookan, Coast Salishan, and Interior Salishan peoples (Rigsby 1965:200-218).

It appears that there has been similar cross-genetic lexical borrowing among several Pacific Northwest languages which involves two words for the Sasquatch phenomenon.

My main Umatilla Sahaptin informant told me of tall monstrous beings that live in the mountains and carry off people who never return. They are called st'iyaháma (-ma *plural*);[2] in English, she referred to them as "Stick-Indians." These beings are not to be confused with the panakhlamaichhláma *those who lead astray*. The latter are little people who also live in the mountains.

Melville Jacobs (1934:1:206) has reported that the same form is used among the Taitnapam Sahaptins of the Upper Cowlitz region of the Washington Cascades. His footnote remarks say:

> According to interpreter Eyley Jr., the s̓tiyahá or kwi·kwiyái ("Whistler") people are beings who sleep in daytime but go about at night. Night is day to them. A child is admonished not to speak of them by their right name, s̓tiyahá, lest they hear, take sharp notice, come and capture a person, and cause temporary disappearance or death.

The Northern Molala of the Oregon Cascades use a similar form, [šťíya], to designate a sort of mountain being larger than humans.[3] They too are said to carry off persons and horses. The Molala also call them [łipä·ni]. The similar Sahaptin and Molala forms provide the first example of cross-genetic lexical borrowing. To my knowledge, the forms are not morphologically transparent in either language.

As is well known, the Sasquatch phenomenon is common knowledge among the Coast Salishan peoples of the British Columbia Coast. Actually, it is known to all the peoples of the Coast at least so far north as the Tsimshian-speaking groups. In early August of 1967, I spent three days working with William Freeman, an intelligent native man of Klemtu,[4] a small mixed Coast Tsimshian-Northern Kwakiutl village about 35 miles north of Bella Bella. During the course of our linguistic work in Coast Tsimshian and Heiltsuk Kwakiutl there, William volunteered a list of similar forms used for the Sasquatch phenomenon by various Coast peoples.

William said that the name was indeed [sɛsk^{w}ác] in some nameless Coast Salish language spoken near Vancouver. However, in the language spoken at Cape Mudge, presumably some Kwakiutl dialect, the name is [bák^{ʔw}ɩs]. The Bella Coola Coast Salish form is [búks], while the Heiltsuk Kwakiutl is [p^{h}ʔk^{w}ʊs]. The Kitimat Kwakiutl form, William said, is [búk^{ʔw}ʊ́s], and the Klemtu Coast Tsimshian is [bák^{ʔw}ɩs]. William glossed these all as *ape* and described them as creatures that live in the woods. And indeed the Gitksan of the Skeena Valley, who speak a dialect of Nass-Gitksan, the interior language of the Tsimshian family, refer to the same as [gɛ́dm̓ gilílix̂] *man of the woods* or [gɛ́dm̓ lax̂ sginíst^{h}] *man on the jackpines*. I believe that I've also heard the same form, [gɛ́dm̓ gilháwli] *man of the woods*, in Coast Tsimshian.

Thus, the set of forms clustering about [bák^{ʔw}ɩs] provides a second example of cross-genetic lexical borrowing. The form appears to be Kwakiutl in origin. Boas (1911:434) analyzes it as a stem plus suffix combination and he glosses it as *man in woods*, although he does not relate it to the Sasquatch phenomenon. As well, the cross-genetic occurrence of the forms which gloss as *man in woods* or *man of the woods* seems to have historical significance; *viz.*, they are loan translations.

I am sure that my Pacific Northwest linguistic colleagues and knowledgeable native people can add forms and comments to these materials. What is greatly to be desired are native language texts concerning the Sasquatch phenomenon. Unfortunately, I have not collected any.

Footnotes

1 I do not intend the term "cross-genetic lexical borrowing" to be taken in its strongest sense because it is not possible to demonstrate that two or more languages are not genetically related. I prefer to speak of the lack of relatability among languages in those cases in which it is not possible to demonstrate genetic relationship.

Of the languages and language families mentioned here, I believe that Sahaptin (a member of the Sahaptian language family), Chinookan, Molala, and Tsimshian can all be shown to be distantly related members of the larger far-flung Penutian grouping. And of course, Kwakiutl (a member of the Wakashan language family) and Salishan have long been thought to be included in the larger Mosan grouping. The evidence for Mosan, however, is problematic and controversial.

Also, Sapir (1916:84-85) long ago suggested that Tsimshian, Kwakiutl and Salishan shared certain morphological features which indicated more intimate cultural contact in the past. I have assembled more evidence for this proposition in my unpublished paper, "Some Linguistic Insights into Recent Tsimshian Prehistory" (Rigsby n.d.a), and as I have learned more about Bella Coola Salish from my colleague, Stanley Newman, my opinion has been strengthened.

The point here is that the similarities in the designation of the Sasquatch phenomenon which connect Sahaptin and Molala, on the one hand, and Kwakiutl, Bella Coola and Coast Tsimshian, on the other, are borrowings. They represent "diffusional cumulation," not "archaic residue," to use Swadesh' (1951) apt phrasing.

2 These Sahaptin forms are cited in the practical orthography which is developed and used in my unpublished "A Short Practical Dictionary of the Yakima Sahaptin Language" (Rigsby n.d.b). Phonetically, they are [stiyaháma] and [panakɬamayčɬáma], respectively.

3 This information comes from Melville Jacobs' Northern Molala fileslips.

4 The modern villagers of Klemtu are, in the main, descendants of emigrants from the deserted Coast Tsimshian village of [dɬsǰú·] or Kitisoo on the southwest of Princess Royal Island midway between Kent Inlet and Dallain Point and from the old Xaihais Kwakiutl village of [q^{h}ánɑt^{h}] or Kynoch. Heiltsuk Kwakiutl has become the dominant Indian language in Klemtu, although it is fast losing ground to English. Only a few older people there still speak Coast Tsimshian.

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